

Clear Line of Sight

I stare at my newly tattooed knuckles, *Walk* on the left hand, *Tall* on the right. Then I close my eyes and flex my fingers, visualising those words wrapped around Dad's throat.

He'd always told me to stand up for myself.

Not parental encouragement, just a yell spat in my face as he grabbed my t-shirt, his stinky alcohol breath sucking the oxygen from my air. I used to wish I could disappear like Mum did years ago. She just walked away, didn't look back.

"Why can't you be a man and stand up for yourself?"

Then he'd turn from me in disgust.

On my sixteenth birthday, I took his advice. It was the only gift Dad gave me.

I joined the army. *Be The Best*. I've got the medals to prove it.

So now here I am, back in my childhood battleground. I'll lay in wait then ambush him.

It's what happened to me....

...we'd left the silent empty desert, leaving ephemeral footprints in the shifting sands.

Destination Helmand River. Crowded with buildings, trees, cornfields. Vision blurred by pollen dust and sweat. Then -

Snipers. Jelly legs, skin tingle. Adrenalin rush. Machine gun fire.

"Get down!"

Spinal cord severed....

Now I clench my fists.

He's there, in front of me. And I see he is nothing.

"Well Dad, I stood up for myself, like you said."

I unclench my fists, turn, and manoeuvre my wheelchair down the path.

I leave before he can walk away.